








# *Spiradiclis scorpiura* (Rubiaceae), a new species from Guangxi, China

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## Abstract

*Spiradiclis scorpiura* (Rubiaceae), a new calcareous species found in Guangxi, China, is described and illustrated. This new species is similar to *S. coccinea*, *S. scabrida*, and *S. purpureocaerulea* in having pubescent stems and subglobose capsules, but it is easily distinguished by its cincinnous inflorescence and its triangular, 1–2 mm long, pubescent bracteoles. According to the IUCN criteria, it is considered Data Deficient (DD) until more information becomes available. Photographs, an illustration, a distribution map, and a comparative table with the most similar species are provided.

**Key words:** Daxin County, limestone, new species, sinkhole, taxonomy

## Introduction

*Spiradiclis* Blume closely resembles *Ophiorrhiza* L., and the two genera are in the tribe Ophiorrhizeae based on morphological characteristics (Verdcourt 1958; Darwin 1976; Lo 1999; Chen and Taylor 2011; Wu et al. 2019) and molecular evidence (Bremer 2009; Rydin et al. 2009; Wikström et al. 2013; Razafimandimbison and Rydin 2019). Razafimandimbison and Rydin (2019) suggested that *Spiradiclis* is a synonym of *Ophiorrhiza*. However, we consider that the delimitation and relationship of the two genera still need further research, and since *Spiradiclis* is morphologically different from *Ophiorrhiza* by its linear-oblong or subglobose capsules with four valves (vs. obcordate and compressed capsules with two valves), we prefer the traditional concept of *Spiradiclis*, thereby considering it separate from *Ophiorrhiza*.

There are a total of 62 *Spiradiclis* species, according to Plants of the World Online (POWO 2024). They are distributed in southeastern Asia, including Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Most of the species are distributed in China and are native to the south and southwest of the country. In the last decade, more than 20 new species of *Spiradiclis* have been discovered in China (e.g., Wang 2016; Zhang et al. 2018; Pan et al. 2019; Tong et al. 2020; Cai et al. 2022; Nong et al. 2024).



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During field surveys in Daxin County, Guangxi, in July 2024, a *Spiradiclis* population was found in flower and fruit that was morphologically similar to *Spiradiclis coccinea* H.S.Lo. However, this newly collected *Spiradiclis* is distinctly different from *S. coccinea* by its elliptic leaves and cincinnous inflorescence. Therefore, this population was suspected to represent a new species. This was confirmed by more observations, the examination of specimens of closely related *Spiradiclis* species from the herbaria PE, IBK, GXMI, and KUN, and by consulting relevant literature. Hence, we confirm that the unusual plant is a species of *Spiradiclis* new to science, and the newly discovered taxon is here described as a new species.

## Materials and methods

Fieldwork was carried out in Daxin County, Guangxi, to document the new species in its natural habitat. In addition, studies of herbarium material of various *Spiradiclis* species were conducted at PE, IBK, GXMI, and KUN, and relevant literature was consulted (Lo et al. 1983; Wang 2002; Wang et al. 2015; Wu et al. 2015, 2016, 2019; Pan et al. 2016; Liu et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2018; Wen et al. 2019; Li et al. 2021; Song et al. 2022). Additional related *Spiradiclis* species were examined based on online images from the Kew Herbarium Catalogue (<http://apps.kew.org/herbcat/gotoHomePage.do>) and JSTOR Global Plants (<http://plants.jstor.org/>). Morphological characteristics of stems, leaves, pedicels, flowers, receptacles, gynoecea, and carpels were used to distinguish *Spiradiclis* species in this study.

The description is based on the type specimens. Measurements were made with a tape measure and callipers. The structure of the indumentum and its distribution were observed and described using a dissecting microscope at magnifications of more than 20×. Additional information on locality, habitat, ecology, plant form, and fruits was collected in the field. The preliminary conservation threat assessment followed IUCN Categories and Criteria (IUCN 2022).

## Results and discussion

### Taxonomy

***Spiradiclis scorpiura* Y.Nong & L.Wu, sp. nov.**

[urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:77356517-1](https://nomenclature.ipni.org/names/77356517-1)

Figs 1–4

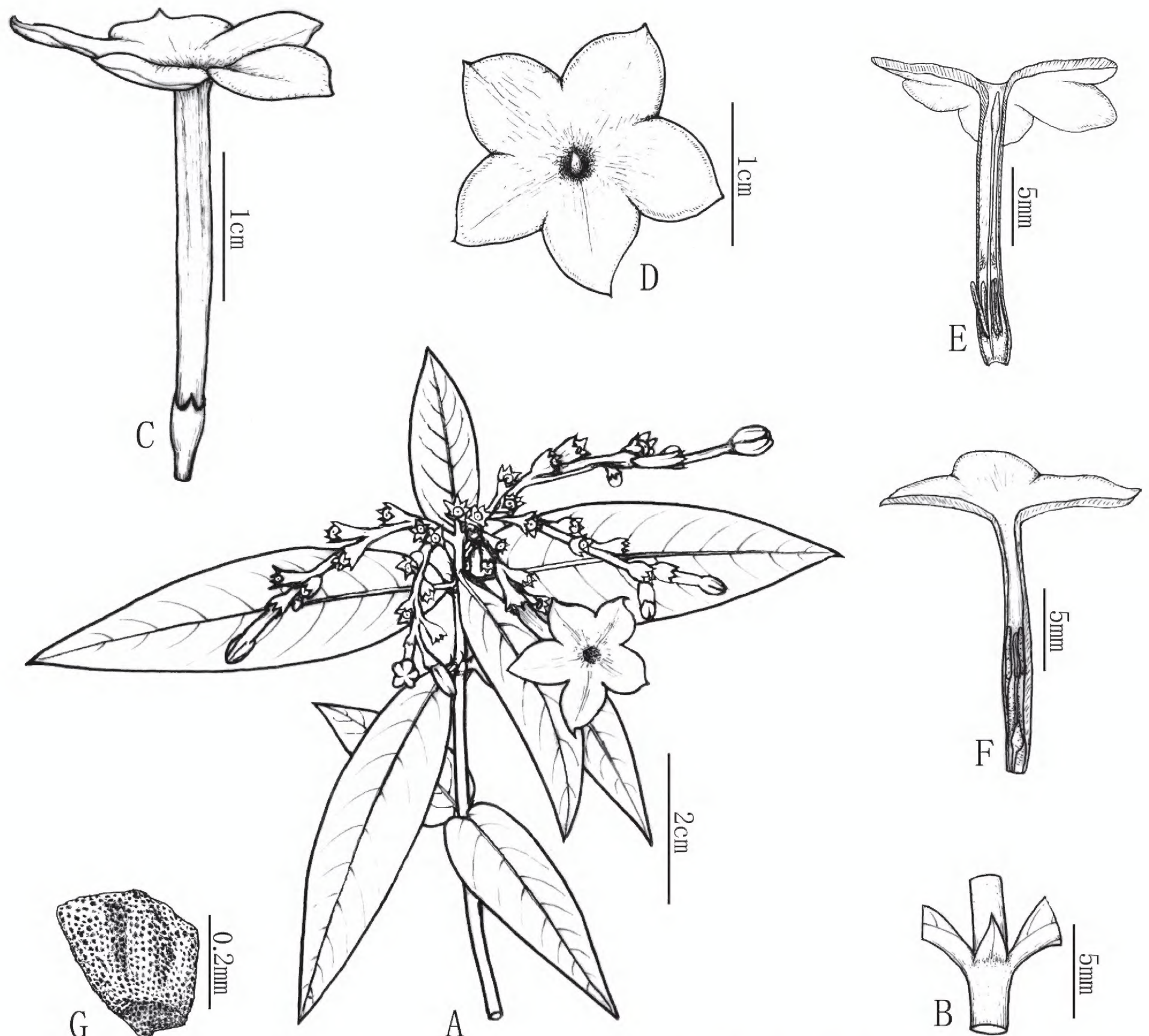
**Chinese name.** xiě wěi luó xù cǎo (蝎尾螺序草).

**Diagnosis.** *Spiradiclis scorpiura* is most similar to *S. coccinea* but is different in its densely pubescent young stems that become glabrous when older (vs. glabrous or subglabrous), its cincinnous inflorescences (vs. cymose), its triangular, 1–2 mm long, pubescent bracteoles (vs. subulate, 3–4 mm long, glabrous), its calyx puberulent outside (vs. glabrescent outside), and its capsule 3–4 mm in diam. (vs. 4.5–5.5 mm in diam.).

**Type.** CHINA • Guangxi, Daxin County, 22°54'06"N, 106°50'02"E, alt. 504 m, at the rim of the top of a sinkhole, 11 July 2024, flowering, Y. Nong NY2024071101 (GXMI). (**Holotype:** GXMI! 051187; isotype: IBK!).

**Description.** Subshrubs, perennial, 20–50 cm tall, rooting near base, stems ascending; stems densely pubescent when young but glabrous when old.

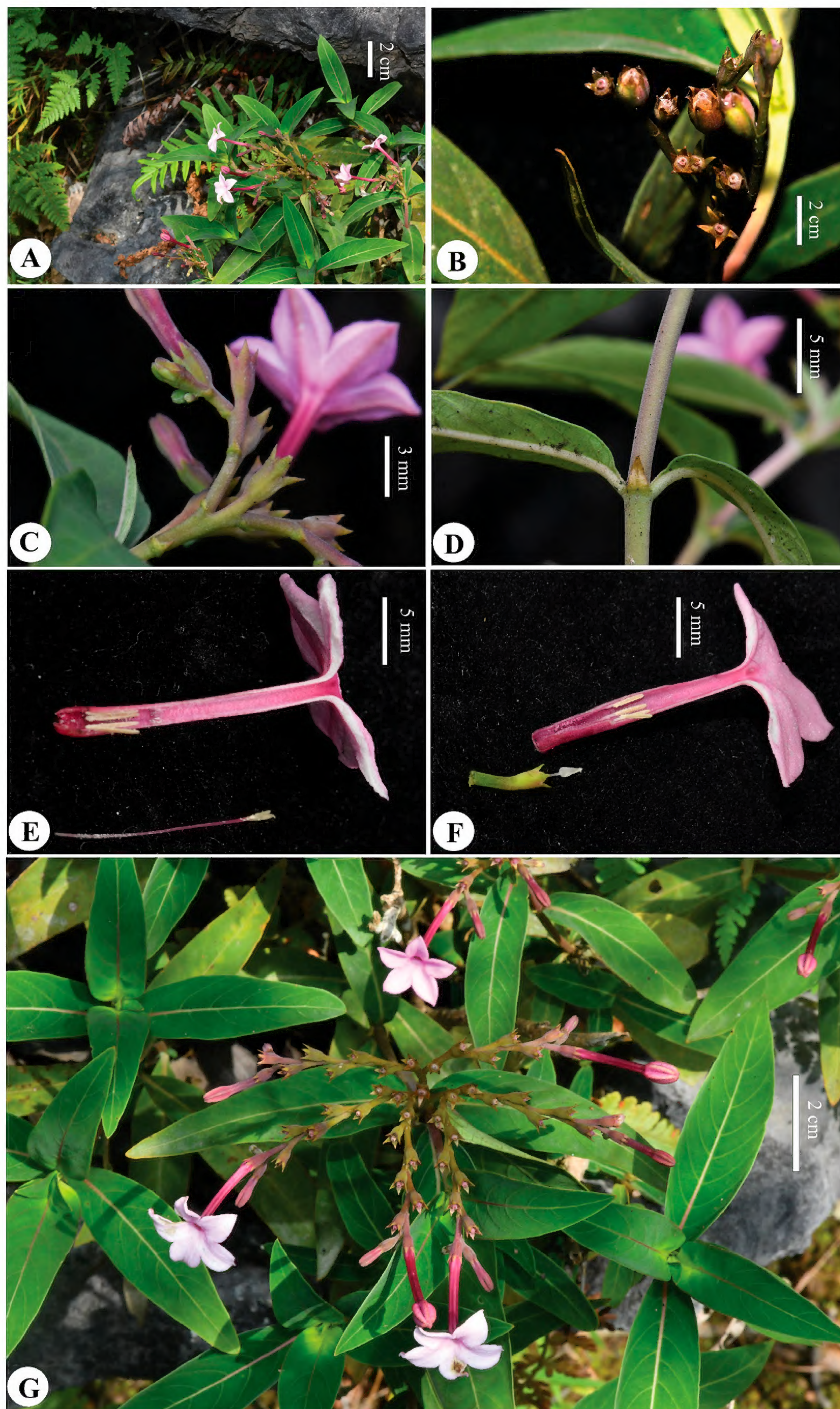




**Figure 1.** Line drawing of *Spiradiclis scorpiura* Y.Nong & L.Wu **A** flowering plant **B** stipule **C** flower **D** long-styled flower, frontal view, showing corolla lobes and stigma **E** longitudinally opened long-styled flower, showing the position of the stamens and the style and stigma **F** longitudinally opened short-styled flower, showing the position of the stamens and the style and stigma **G** seed (Drawn by Xin-cheng Qu).

Leaves opposite; petiole 1–2 mm long, sparsely pubescent; blade drying papery, adaxially olive green, abaxially yellowish green, elliptic, 3–7 × 0.5–1.5 cm, sparsely pubescent or glabrous on both surfaces, margin entire, base cuneate, apex acuminate; secondary veins 8–12 on each side of the midrib, midrib concave adaxially and prominently convex abaxially; stipules triangular, 1–2 mm long, glabrous outside, apex acute. Inflorescences terminal, cincinnous, 3–6 branched, 3–44-flowered, pubescent; peduncles 0.6–1 cm long, pubescent; pedicels short, c. 1 mm long, pubescent; bracteoles triangular, 1–2 mm long, pubescent outside. Flowers distylous. Calyx pubescent; hypanthium portion obovate, 1–2 mm long, with 5 straight ridges; lobes 5, triangular or ovate-lanceolate, 1–1.5 mm long. Corolla purple, slenderly salverform-funnelform, glabrous or pubescent outside; tube 15–18 mm long, lobes broadly ovate to suborbicular, 6–8 mm long. Stamens 5. Style filiform, stigma clavate,





**Figure 2.** *Spiradiclis scorpiura* Y.Nong & L.Wu **A** habit **B** detail of fruiting plant **C** inflorescence **D** stipule **E** longitudinally opened, long-styled flower **F** longitudinally opened, short-styled flower **G** flowering plant (photographed and edited by You Nong).

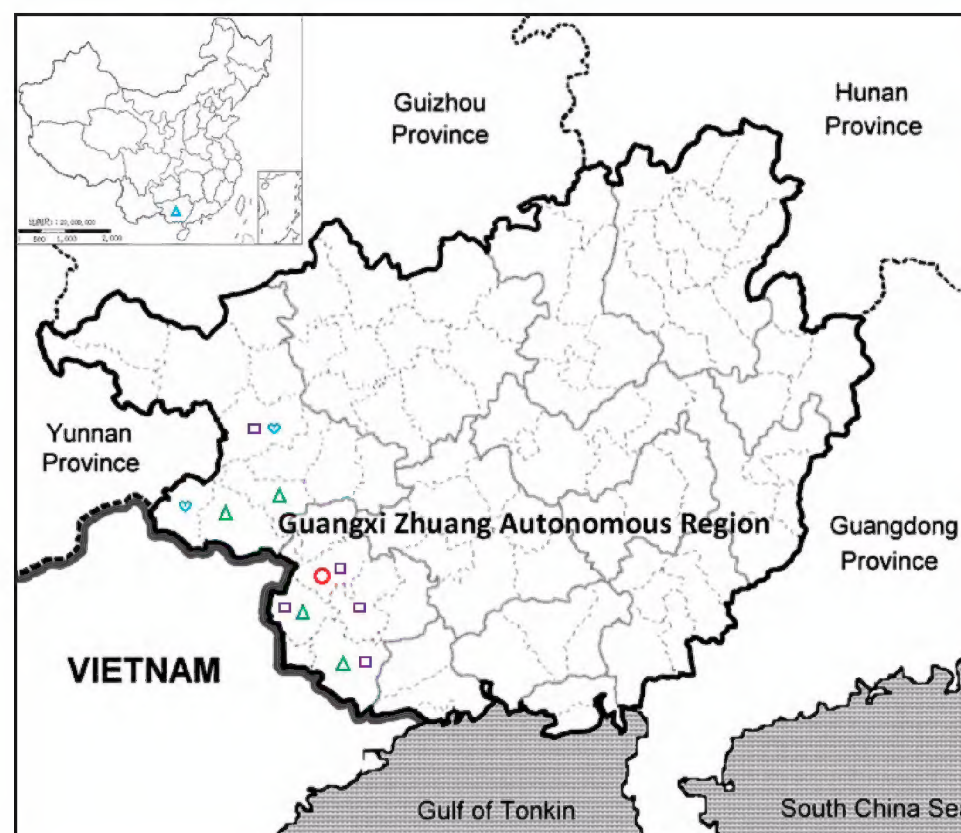




Figure 3. Holotype specimen of *Spiradiclis scorpiura* Y.Nong & L.Wu, Y. Nong NY2024071101 (GXMI! 051187).

2-lobed, lobes linear, c. 2 mm long. Long-styled flowers: corolla tube with pilose ring above stamens inside; stamens born near the base of the tube, anthers sessile or subsessile, c. 3 mm long; style c. 1.5 cm long or slightly longer. Short-styled flowers: corolla tube pubescent near the base inside;





**Figure 4.** Distribution of *Spiradiclis scorpiura* (red circle), *S. coccinea* (green triangle), *S. scabrada* (blue heart), and *S. purpureocaerulea* (purple square) in Guangxi (blue triangle in insert map), China.

stamens born in the middle of the tube, anthers sessile or subsessile, c. 2 mm long; style c. 4 mm long. Capsules subglobose, 3–4 mm in diam., glabrescent, valves 4. Seeds numerous, angular, c. 0.2 mm in diam.

**Phenology.** Flowering and fruiting in June–July.

**Etymology.** The specific epithet “*scorpiura*” refers to the terminal, cincinnous inflorescences of the new species.

**Distribution and habit.** Known only from southeast Guangxi, China. The species has only been found at the rim of a sinkhole at elevations of 504 m.

**Preliminary IUCN red list category.** Data available for the new species, only known from the type locality and the type specimens, are insufficient to assess its conservation status. According to the IUCN Criteria (IUCN 2022), it is considered Data Deficient (DD) until more information becomes available. *Spiradiclis scorpiura* is currently known from a single, relatively large population. Further collection and monitoring are necessary to allow more conclusive estimations about the rarity and vulnerability of the species.

### Comparison with other *Spiradiclis* species

In addition, *S. scorpiura* also looks similar to *S. scabrada* D.Fang & D.H.Qin, but is different by its shorter petioles (1–2 mm vs. 2–5 mm long), its cincinnous inflorescences (vs. corymbose-cymose), and its triangular, 1–2 mm long, pubescent bracteoles (vs. linear, 2–5 mm long, glabrous). *Spiradiclis scorpiura* is also similar to *S. purpureocaerulea* H.S.Lo, but it differs in its densely pubescent young stems that become glabrous when old (vs. densely pubescent young and old stems), its elliptic leaves, pubescent or glabrous on both surfaces (vs. ovate, adaxially densely strigose-hispidulous, abaxially densely pubescent), its 1–2 mm long petioles (vs. 5–20 mm long), its cincinnous inflorescences (vs. congested-cymose), and its triangular, 1–2 mm long, pubescent bracteoles (vs. narrowly lanceolate, 4–5 mm long, densely pubescent). More detailed morphological differences amongst the similar species are shown in Table 1.



Table 1. Main morphological differences between *Spiradiclis scorpiura*, *S. coccinea*, *S. scabrida*, and *S. purpureocaerulea*.

Morphological traits	<i>S. scorpiura</i>	<i>S. coccinea</i>	<i>S. scabrida</i>	<i>S. purpureocaerulea</i>
Stems	densely pubescent when young but glabrous when old	glabrous or subglabrous	pubescent to glabrescent	densely pubescent
Leaves	elliptic, sparsely pubescent or glabrous on both surfaces	narrowly elliptic-oblong or elliptic-oblong, glabrous on both surfaces	ovate, narrowly ovate, or lanceolate, abaxially glabrous or occasionally sparsely strigillose or scabridulous at least on principal veins	ovate, adaxially densely strigose-hispidulous, abaxially densely pubescent
Length of petioles	1–2 mm	1–2 mm	2–5 mm	5–20 mm
Stipules	triangular, 1–2 mm long, glabrous outside	triangular, rapidly narrowed to subulate, 4–5 mm long, glabrous outside	subtriangular, 0.7–1 mm long, subglabrous outside	subulate, 2–3 mm long, pubescent outside
Inflorescence	cincinnous, 3–6-branched, pubescent	cymose, with more than 10 flowers, pubescent	corymbose-cymose, 3-24-flowered, pubescent, puberulent, or glabrescent	congested-cymose, densely pubescent
Bracteoles	triangular, 1–2 mm long, pubescent outside	subulate, 3–4 mm long, glabrous outside	linear, 2–5 mm long, glabrous outside	narrowly lanceolate, 4–5 mm long, densely pubescent outside
Calyx	puberulent outside; hypanthium portion obovate, 1–2 mm long, with 5 straight ridges; lobes triangular or ovate-lanceolate, 1–1.5 mm long	glabrescent outside; hypanthium portion obconic, 1.2–1.5 mm long; lobes narrowly lanceolate, 1.7–2 mm long	puberulent outside; hypanthium portion obovate, 1–1.5 mm long; lobes ovate-lanceolate, 1–1.5 mm long	pubescent outside; hypanthium portion obconic-globose, c. 2 mm long; lobes narrowly lanceolate, 4–4.5 mm long
Corolla	tube 15–20 mm long, lobes broadly ovate to suborbicular, 6–8 mm long	tube 15–18 mm long, lobes broadly ovate to suborbicular, 4.5–6 mm long	tube 25–26 mm long; lobes ovate, c. 3.5 mm long	tube 19–21 mm long; lobes subovate, c. 6 mm long
Capsule	subglobose, 3–4 mm in diam.	subglobose, 4.5–5.5 mm in diam.	subglobose, 3–4 mm in diam.	subglobose, 4–4.5 mm in diam.

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Additional information

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Ethical statement

No ethical statement was reported.

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Author contributions

Data curation: YN; Funding acquisition: YN and CGX; Investigation: YN, CGX, and YGW; Methodology: YN, LQL, and YGW; Project administration: YN and YJL; Supervision: QMH, LW; Visualisation: YN, LQL, QXC; Writing—original draft: YN; Writing—review and editing: YN.



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## Data availability

All of the data that support the findings of this study are available in the main text.

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